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BOOKS ON UFOs Forty Years of UFO Literature in Italy by Marcello Pupilli

The author has just compiled a complete bibliography on UFOs and related subjects, published by CISU as a monograph in the "Documenti UFO" series. It is not the first catalogue of Italian UFO books, but it is the first one attempting to determine methodological criteria.

CRITERIA OF INCLUSION

A first problem (Physical Criterion) was to separate monographic texts (to be included) from periodical ones. Apart from books and booklets, we included proceedings and short monographs but not monographic issues of periodicals nor supplements to periodicals. Moreover, only texts having reached some diffusion were considered as "published" (not unpublished manuscripts).

As for Typological Criteria, we defined the argument as "the UFO issue and derivated subjects". By "derivated", we mean those subjects as contactees and ancient astronauts.

CLASSES

Books were classified according to the amount of space they give to the argument:

- A) UFO books in the strictest sense
- B) texts on UFO-derivated subjects (as defined above)
- C) texts on other subjects, but at least one chapter on UFOs
- D) less than a chapter but at least some pages on UFOs
- E) a page or less on UFOs.

For each text included in classes C, D, E the main argument of the book is also indicated.

A FIRST ANALYSIS

384 texts were catalogued for the period 1948 through 1988. 114

were class-A (strictly ufological) items; 90 were class-B (derivated: 49 on ancient astronauts, 41 on/by contactees). The remaining 179 books had the following main arguments: Fortean/psychic phenomena (66), astronomy/exobiology (32), occult/magic/astrology (23), archaeology (23), aeronautics/astronautics (15), miscellaneous (30, 8 of which on "the unexplained"). 118 had at least a full chapter on UFOs (class-C).

AUTHORS

Italian authors were 187, foreign ones 118 (plus 7 "aliens"!). Fourteen authors wrote four or more books each, but only 3 of them were ufologists. The most published authors are the 'ancient astronauts' ones: Peter Kolosimo (14 books), Eric von Daeniken (8), Walter Raymond Drake (7), plus some contactees and professional writers. The most published ufologist is the Spanish Antonio Ribera (5 books translated in Italian).

PUBLISHERS

As many as 99 publishers were listed, the first ten ones publishing more than half of the total (209). Only 56 books were published by big publishing houses, while as many as 138 by specialistic publishers. The more active publishers were Armenia (44), SugarCo (30) and Mediterranee (29). That explains the collapse in UFO publications after 1980: four publishers stopping their UFO interest were enough to bring to zero the UFO books published.

No less than 15 texts were privately published by the authors themselves, and a 40 more were published by UFO organizations: that is a large percentage of UFO texts are printed by "ourselves".

DISTRIBUTION BY YEAR

The decade 1971-1980 saw the greatest number of published books in Italy: 228 items (59.3%), with a peak in 1978 (37). Such distribution closely followed the UFO sightings pattern for both that decade and the year 1978. It may be due to a cause-effect relationship: increase in UFO sightings and thus in media interest producing an interest by publishers. But an opposite link may also be true: it may be the publishing to stimulate public interest and thus UFO sighting/reporting.

Indeed, up to 1971 ufology was a "private" matter of concern for only a handful of buffs, which were exchanging info by mimeographed newsletters and correspondence. In 1971 the monthly "Giornale dei misteri" was first published and distributed nationally, thus precipitating a latent public interest for the occult and the unexplained (including UFOs). Several similar publications followed, as well as book collections. Of course the times were ready for all such pseudo-science, as literally hundreds of UFO buff groups formed all over Italy and began busily collecting UFO sighting reports. Flaps followed flaps up to 1978 and the great UFO wave (more than 1000 reported sightings). After the peak, the fall began: public interest for the unexplained was rapidly diminishing, occult magazines folded and book publishing too.

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UFOs AT THE TURIN BOOK EXHIBITION A Glance at Today's Publishing Situation by Gian Paolo Grassino

As you may see from the published graph, the 1980's whole decade saw a fall in the number of published UFO books in Italy, even when UFO

sightings began again to be reported. We tried to understand why by visiting the second Turin Book Exhibition, in May 1989, where nearly all Italian publishing houses were represented. We looked for new titles and asked from old publishers.

NEW TITLES

The only new book was "Il Contattato - Le intelligenze volumetriche extraterrestri ci parlano", by Filippo & Gianni Bongiovanni, about contactee Eugenio Siragusa. A UFO section was featured in the "Reader's Digest" volume "Cronache dell'impossibile".

Only a few old books are still available on the market. We asked Mediterranean publisher why so little interest for UFOs, and they quoted the very low sales of their latest UFO title: Claude Vorilhon ("Rael")'s "ETs took me to their planet". Not distinguish between ufology and cultism is a sign of their deep knowledge. As for contactees, we noted that their religious overtones have been growing in the latest years (at the same time as a general return of mysticism), so that their interest got further and further away from physical reality and UFO sightings: now that's all in the "message" and the "faith", so they don't need any "alien evidence" any more. And that's good news for us.

OLD BOOKS STILL AVAILABLE

Mediterranee has still a few old UFO books available (mostly cultist ones, but also the excellent 1975 photo-history by G. De Turreis & S. Fusco, "Obiettivo sugli UFO").

Fanucci has both his 1978 UFO titles available (J. McDonald's "UFOs and Science" and J. Keel's "Strange Creatures from Time and Space"), but is now only publishing SF and fantasy novels.

Still UFO-active is Armenia, who recently published G. Kinder's "Light Years" and B. Hopkins' "Intruders": both were very badly received by the Italian public, a sign that the USA Strieber-like tendency to publish "stories" instead of fact/research UFO books is not apt to us Europeans.

None of the UFO publishers of the '70s has anything left in their catalogues. It must be said that the latest strictly ufological books were published in 1984: Rino Di Stefano's "Luci nella notte - UFO: il caso Zanfretta" and J. Vallée's "Messengers of Deception".

The only new presence is "Nuovi Autori" publisher (who ask authors to pay for publishing expenses), recently printed Dante Minazzoli's "Perché gli extraterrestri non prendono contatto pubblicamente?", a very peculiar book analysing the UFO phenomena in an unprecedented marxist-leninist view, supporting it with a very naive attitude to ufology. Unfortunately, such publisher would allow books to be published not depending on their potential value, but only on the money the would-be author wishes to spend!

POSSIBLE REASONS

A first reason for such a dark situation is the "amateurism" of several publishers of "the unexplained": small houses with limited resources, jumping on the bandwagon where UFOs were "in", without an adequate planning; they published a lot, but not all good, so when the UFO interest began to diminish, readers disappeared (saturated by tons of useless books) and publishers turned elsewhere.

A second consideration concerns the "evolution" of occult publishing in the last years. In the '70s, top subjects were ancient astronauts, psychic phenomena, Oriental philosophies, all with an "experimental", i.e. "acting" approach (sky-watching for UFOs, spiritism). Deep

changes have since happened in social attitudes: the return of mysticism in particular, as opposed to materialism and positivism. That meant leaving the pragmatic interest in the unexplained for a more spiritual, individual knowledge: ufology and ESP left their place to astrology, divination, psychic healing and a general esoteric underground.

Small, specialized publishers are flourishing with books on "interior growth", meditation and ways of getting "knowledge". The aim is spiritual, not active, in nature. Their only contact with concrete reality is with ecological themes.

Such transformation took space away from ufology within the "unexplained". Today's ufology has changed and - though still grouping a lot of people who are just searching for mystery and sensation - it has got over the "unexplained" of the '70s, and we've built up a new road of our own. Indeed, ufology presently has no clear collocation: still rejected as a "scientific" matter, it finds no longer place in such "esoteric" New Age. That is reflected on the interest shown by publishers, more concerned with today's source of income.

It follows that a strong need is felt to search within our own environment for resources not only for researching but also for circulating information and a much needed ufological publishing.

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A FIRE IN THE SKY
The Luminous Phenomena of March 21, 1989
by Paolo Toselli

On March 21, 1989 at 19.30 p.m., thousands of people from all over Northern and Central Italy (but also in Switzerland and Southeastern France, as well) watched amazed as a strange brightness in the western sky grew to a white/red upwards trail exploding into a large bright cloud, later slowly dissolved. Let's hear some testimonies.

TESTIMONIES

A motorist driving near Montecala (Savona) saw a trailed white point-like source coming up fast from behind the mountains. Suddenly it went to the right and disappeared. Then he saw a kind of square in the sky and lastly a white cloud. It all lasted 3-4 minutes.

At around 19.20 a journalist and former ufologist in Chiavari (Genova) saw a smoky halo above the roofs. At its center, there was a shape like a camera diaphragm and within this a small bright star which was rising and enlarging. After about 20 seconds the star stopped and slowly disappeared.

Another driver in Sanremo (Imperia), at the same time, saw a bright, white light coming closer from the sea direction. Suddenly, it waved a little and took off "at a mad speed", leaving a black "helix"-shaped sign with white smoke around it. A little higher up, another light appeared, which slowly disappeared after ten minutes.

Several motorists on the Imperia-Sanremo highway stopped and looked at a neon-like missile-shaped light raising from behind the hills at 19.30. The light suddenly stopped and began descending, while a pentagon-shaped "hole in the sky" became visible. At the end, only a whitish cloud remained visible.

It was nearly 19.30 when a couple driving near Carmagnola (Torino) saw a small red light slowly coming up from behind the Alps, in the western sky. It suddenly accelerated "like the space shuttle launch in TV" and its red trail widened to a silver, vertical stripe illuminating the mountains below and raising up to a parabolic path which arrived at 45° above the horizon and then began descending toward the terrorized

witnesses. The driver braked to a stop under a bridge, but the light "exploded" into a dark saucer-shaped mass which suddenly disappeared in the dark sky, as well as the long silver bow-shaped trail did, only leaving a large spiral of luminous smoke falling back down, which the witnesses were able to photograph for almost ten minutes.

At 19.15, an astronomer at Chieri (Torino) saw a white trail coming above Turin up to 45°, then it disappeared and only a bright, shape-changing cloud remained visible at the horizon for 15 minutes.

RECONSTRUCTION

The Italian Center for UFO Studies (CISU) has yet collected over sixty testimonies from all over Northern Italy. Reported times varied in a range from 19.10 to 19.40. Two distinct phases emerged from the reports: the bright point of light coming up vertically to an explosion into a white cloud, within which a five-pointed star-like shape was noted by many. As the surrounding smoke was dissolving, a second brighter cloud became visible at its side, which dissolved on turn. The second phase was watched by fewer people, according to their distance from the mountains: a bright mass above the horizon, similar to a yellow-red trail, visible for nearly half an hour. This was photographed by many.

THE PICTURES

Among the best photos of the phenomenon, we got a set of nine slides taken from Acqui Terme (Alessandria). The witness had plenty of time to mount his camera on a tripod and snap it with different lenses (85 mm. and 150 mm.) and exposures (from 30 seconds to a full minute). The pictures show a cone-shaped spiral like a smoke trail of yellow-orange color. The four pictures using the wider lens also show a tube-shaped non-luminous mass, blue in color, higher and souther than the main trail. Through French colleagues we also obtained pictures taken in Southern France, nearly identical.

THE PRESS

Newspapers gave a wide (though fairly short) coverage to the unusual event. On the following day a lot of dailies told of the sightings, equally divided between the "UFO" and the "missile" interpretation (with some "northern lights", too). The missile was less interesting than the UFO, so as such hypothesis became prevalent on March 23rd, the press lost its interest.

HYPOTHESES

As usual, a lot of more or less serious hypotheses were advanced by reporters and "experts", some being quite ridiculous.

We mentioned the "rare occurrence" of a northern light (aurora borealis), which had indeed been seen as south as New York, Central France and Italy a few days before.

Less credible was the explosion of the French nuclear central "Superphénix" (just beyond the Italian border), but it was the first to come to the mind of many a witness calling Police, Fire Brigade and Civil Protection (the Communist Party even asked an interrogation to the Regional Government in Turin).

Since the first day the best-fitting hypothesis was the missile. Indeed an escaped "illuminating missile" was advocated by the French Gendarmerie on the late evening of March 21st, a few hours after the sightings.

The real answer only arrived the day after.

THE EXPLANATION

It was indeed a ballistic S-3 missile launched from the military base (Centre d'Essais des Landes) of Biscarosse, near Bordeaux (south-western France): a perfect launch west-ward (towards the Atlantic sea) of a nuclear strategic missile (though no atomic bomb was on board this exercise launch, of course!). The S-3 is 14 meters long, goes as far as 3,000 kilometers and weights 25.8 tons. Nine such missiles were stored in 1980 (substituting older S-2 missiles) and one has been launched each year since, for exercise purposes. A Navy ship usually follows the launch and analyses the flight and descent behavior, often also recovering the missile head.

So was the watched phenomenon an S-3? No less than four azimuth measures we collected from eye-witnesses do converge to the Bordeaux area. The reported double explosion would be due to the two stages separating. According to the Base press officer, on March 21 the missile got up to 1,000 kilometers of altitude, then began a descending parabola down to the sea, where it finally fell at 2,000 kilometers west of Biscarosse.

Very good viewing conditions that evening allowed eye-witnesses to see it from more than 900 kilometers away. In fact witnesses were placed only east of the launching site because the sun-illuminated exhaust vapors were only visible to observers in the Earth's "shadow-cone" on the Sun-missile axis. Indeed such launchings (as well as barium-cloud scientific test missiles) usually take place at dusk for that reason.

May we add that it was also suggested this could be the first launch of the new-generation S-4, which might have had some technical trouble, rendering it particularly visible.

ANOMALOUS CASES

We cannot fail to mention some very different, say "anomalous" descriptions of the phenomenon we got by a few witnesses.

Among the testimonies received at the Savona office of "Il Secolo XIX" daily, an anonymous caller told he had been poaching for wild-pigs near Finale Ligure (SV), on the Melogno Hill, when he had suddenly seen the hill itself open up and a ten-meters long missile coming out with a bang, flames and an unbearably hot wave. Frightened, he had run to his car, whence he turned back to see the missile rising into the sky and a five points star above it (the hill is rumored to be a secret NATO underground base).

At Borgo San Giacomo (Brescia), a young couple saw a yellow ball of light emitting a beacon which illuminated a farm as if by daylight. The object came toward them, then disappeared. A plane-like noise was also reportedly heard.

An even more UFO-like report was that by a British Island Airways flight above Sardinia: passengers' heads were hitting onto the ceiling as the pilot veered down after calling their attention to a bright multi-colored body, which was also seen by several planes flying over Central Italy. An Air Force pilot over Florence even reported a bright trail from a "metallic-looking object" crossed his path west to east ending into a strong explosion no more than 5 kilometers from his plane!

Last, but not least, one of the religious devotee at Balestrino (Savona), where BVM apparitions are said to occur, saw the phenomenon as a "celestial sign". No wonder the contactee monthly "Nonsiamosoli" (Wearenotalone) recently explained it was no French missile but the spaceship piloted by the Virgin Mary Herself coming here to save us from the asteroid that (according to contactee Eugenio Siragusa) is menacing Earth. Halleluia!

OPERATION "ELECTRE"
A UFO Called "Tibère": Antecedents in the '70s

On February 23, 1971 at around 19.30, a TWA airliner and a private plane simultaneously called the Air Traffic Control in Milan telling a bright ball of fire was coming toward them, and finally fell onto the ground in the Alps, where it allegedly started a fire. This front-page news had the first in all Italian newspapers on the following days, also because at that same hour hundreds of people in the northwestern region of Piemonte noticed what was often thought to be a falling plane. Some pictures were also taken from different places, and more sightings arrived from as far as southern France and northeastern Spain.

Ufologists were busily collecting data, and even traced the private plane pilot: Retired A.F. Colonel Alfonso Isaia, personal pilot of FIAT industries. But he said he had seen nothing crash onto the mountains, nor a fire in the woods: as it is often the case, the press had deformed his account.

The watched phenomenon was actually due to the re-entry of a French "Tibère" missile launched from - you guessed it! - Biscarosse, whose burning third stage had caused the sky show. It was a scientific launch designed to study electrical phenomena during rockets re-entries. The last stage burned while descending, at a height of 60-130 kms., out of the "shadow cone", so that while observers on the ground were in the dark, the vapor release was still illuminated by the sun, as well as the ionized gaseous trail, and the re-entry of the capsule could be seen by thousands of casual witnesses. The capsule itself was seen falling off-shore by fishing boats at San Sebastian (Spain), where it was rescued by a Navy ship.

The very similar features of this and the 21/3/1989 phenomenon (launching site, time, described phenomena, photos) are due to the fact that the scientific "Operation Electre" was preliminary to the military launchings. Indeed, at least eight of the yearly launchings from Biscarosse between 1965 and 1989 have generated UFO flaps over a wide area of Southern France, with hundreds (often thousands) of witnesses and several photographs each time.

Beside the published photo (taken on June 12, 1974), let's only quote the March 18, 1972 launch, with sightings as east as Austria: the usual ascending light source with trail, its sudden stop and the appearance of a haloed black spot, the smoke trail, the photos, even some EM interferences were reported all over France. The most perplexing sighting took place at Pont-de-Chérucy (Isère, France) at 19.20, where two motorists saw an intense light coming down from an hovering object no higher than 35 meters above the road. It was cylinder-shaped [see drawing] and had three portholes. It moved to the right, then took off rapidly into the sky, leaving a persistent yellow/red "S"-shaped trail, still visible when the police arrived ten minutes later. Here you see how a flying rocket 100 kms. above and 500 kms. away may become a "very close encounter"!

THE CANARY ISLAND UFOs

This editorial box reads about three well-known massive sightings with photographs which took place in the Canary Islands on June 22, 1976, on November 19, 1976 and on March 5, 1979. They were due to missiles launched by off-shore Soviet submarines, as confirmed by the G.S.W. computer photo-analysis and more recently (1987) admitted by the Spanish Air Force.

U.S.S.R.: THE SECRET BASE

Re: the well-known Russian UFO, i.e. the Petrozavodsk "flying jellyfish" of September 20, 1977, actually the launch of Kosmos-955 from the then-secret Plesetsk cosmodrome, as later (1985) admitted by the Soviet Armed Forces journal "Red Star". In that as well as in other Soviet instances (eg. on June 14, 1980 and on May 15, 1981), the UFO label was used as a convenient cover-up for covert military activities.

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HUMANOIDS IN THE EARLY YEARS Italian CE-III's between 1900 and 1950 by Paolo Fiorino

In the last few years a growing number of CE-III reports have been surfacing in Italy, some of them from the past. This article reports on those CE-III's which allegedly took place in the first half of the century, that is before the public came to know of the existence of UFO-related entities. Until 1952 no CE-III had been reported in the press, but during that year the first news was published about the "Facchini case" (April 24, 1950 at Abbiate Gruzzone, Varese), Monguzzi's fake photos (July 31, 1952 on Mt. Bernina, Sondrio), and two more CE-III's of that same year, rather known also abroad (July 25, 1952 at San Pietro a Vico, Lucca; on November 16 at Castelfranco Emilia, Modena).

All other Italian CE-III's for the 1900-1950 period were collected by ufologists only several years later: the Johannis' one (August 14, 1947 at Raveo, Udine) as late as 1964; the Fara di Cigno, Campobasso, case of April 3, 1948, as late as 1972; the Monte Benichi, Arezzo, case of August 1930, as late as 1984.

In order to properly collocate these reports in their historical context, a comparison would be needed with stories printed in the media at the time, both about flying saucers (after 1947) and about other themes, like science-fiction or religious apparitions.

Indeed, while newspapers were often reporting "ghosts" and "Beloved Virgin Mary" sightings [Giuseppe Stilo's "Project Myriam" collected no less than 43 Italian BVM cases before or during 1950, with peaks in 1947 (11) and 1948 (19)], no mention at all can be found of CE-III's, the only exception being an old "airship" newscutting about a "white balloon" seen passing high over Firenze on April 24, 1909, with two white-dressed people on board.

BORDERLINE CASES

Indeed two more reports had a press source, but they are only included here because somebody else before me already did so, since they are not ufological in the strictest sense of the word:

- * In April 1946, fishers off Piombino (Livorno) saw a "flame" descending upon their boat and an entity they identified as the devil coming out from it;
- * On June 21, 1946, some motorists at Gorizia met a woman-shape surrounded with a blue halo, and the cars motors stopped.

Some more reports are "borderline cases" like these, and it is not easy to classify them as UFO-related or not: such difficulty is greater in the pre-arnold era, when witnesses had no "UFO stereotype" to refer entity sightings to. That's true for the "abduction" at Faborino (Reggio Calabria) on February 28, 1933 [see "UFO" issue No. 5 and ITUFOR-7 for

the complete report], as well as for another "ante litteram abduction" allegedly happened in September 1944 at Cormons (Gorizia), but only reported to us after the books "Communion" and "Intruders" were published in Italy, in 1988. The lady witness (30 years old) was riding her bicycle when it suddenly stopped and she "blackened out". Only later on did she remember standing in a "room" with devices and a table, where somebody told her: "we come from far-away worlds" and she saw two white-dressed entities which examined her and did her an injection. She passed through a "bunker" and found herself in a lawn by the road.

Let's now report some cases which allegedly took place in the '30s and '40s, we recently investigated upon.

THE BOILING RIVER

On a morning in 1927, Francesca C. (11 years old) was taking water in the Po river at Corbola (Rovigo) when she saw a round, shining thing coming down into the river at 7-8 meters from her. A few minutes later the "thing" came out again from the boiling water and sped up to the sky, but not before the girl noticed a "small man" within it, visible from the neck up. A hissing sound was also heard and the light nearly blinded her. She never told the story to anybody for 30 years, then she told her family. [Investigation took place in 1988.]

THE GO-KART AND THE FAIRIES

On the afternoon of March 15 or 16, 1943, a 6 years old girl and her 10 years old sister were out pasturing a goat near Montecrestese (Novara) when they heard a loud boom from above and saw a 2-3 meters wide "craft" landing upon a nearby rock. It had two "seats" where two white-dressed, "strange little men" were sitting. The older sister got closer to the beings, that were mumbling to each other in an unknown language, and the girl spoke with them, later telling her younger sister "Don't worry: they were just fairies". The object was described as helicopter-like (without the rotor), metallic green in color, similar to a "go-kart" with a glass dome above, and it had a small headlight on its right side. [Investigation took place in 1986.]

THE "MARTIANS" ARRIVE

At 17 p.m. on one day in 1945 or 1946, 23 years old Amleto B. was walking back home at Foligno (Perugia) when he saw a white bell-shaped "flying saucer" coming down and landing upon the roofs across two houses. It was ten meters in diameter, and had four legs. A door opened and a four feet tall "little man" came out, wearing a coverall and gesturing to the witness, who fled and later saw the "disc" taking off noiseless and getting away very fast. [The testimony was first reported in 1977.]

ENCOUNTERS WITH OTHER "BEINGS"

The remaining three reports are lone entities without any UFO sighted. I only include them because they were reported as UFO-related in previously published UFO sightings catalogs.

- * In or just after 1900, a game-keeper at Voltaggio (Alessandria) felt he was being followed and saw a "monstrous being" with "hen-like legs" who hit him in the face [second-hand story surfacing in 1980].
- * In 1940 several people at the Poggioreale railway station in Napoli allegedly noticed a "metallic looking robot-like humanoid" with bright eyes standing on the railroad and alerting people to stay away "not to be burned" [second-hand rumor surfacing in 1977].

* On an unknown day between 1948 and 1950, 10-11 years old Rita D. was walking back home in Pontegrando (Novara) at dusk, when she heard what sounded like hand-bells sounding. She went investigating and suddenly saw six or seven "dwarfs" collecting something around a large tree. One of them was 1 meter tall, while the others were shorter. They were wearing a red jacket and a cap with hand-bells (like the Joker in play-cards), their shoes were upward-pointed. The entities stopped their activities as if surprised by the girl but she was even more scared at them and fled away. [Investigation took place in 1987.]

SOME REFLECTIONS

It's not easy to evaluate CE-III reports from the 30's and 40's, since they are all single witness accounts told as late as 30 to 60 years later. We simply cannot know how much those accounts have been influenced by what witnesses may have heard or read since. Some terms do show the influence of, among other things, the space conquest and classic UFO stereotyped features that could not be present at the time of the alleged sightings.

Moreover, all witnesses were children or in their early teens at the time of their sighting, usually from poor, rural families with no easy access to books and magazines, though we cannot rule out the role of early science fiction stories in popular, illustrated weeklies.

Most of the witnesses virtually forgot their encounters until an occasional event (a TV broadcast on UFOs, a son interested in ufology, etc.) reminded them of such experiences, as if such experiences were somehow "common", "normal" at the time. This takes us to the remarkable folkloric contents of some of the stories (the witnesses themselves and their families usually interpreted those encounters in a "demonic" or "fairy" context), even if all those interviewed were adamant it was not just a dream, but a true physical event happened to them.

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OPERATION ORIGINS

"Flying Saucers" and the Press in Italy, 1946-1954
by Giuseppe Stilo

In 1984 a research project was launched in order to gain a better understanding of the beginnings of the UFO issue in Italy in the early years. We only had a few newspapers testimonies about those days, so a systematic search through newspaper files for the years 1946-1954 was begun. No less than 100 dailies were being published in those post-war years; only about 30 of them have been scanned as yet. We can estimate the total number of published UFO items in 15,000 or more: a far higher media interest for UFOs than expected was found, as well as a greater number of published sightings reports previously unknown to us.

But the project is not only meant as a collection of older newsclippings: it aims to an analysis of the information being circulated about the UFO saga in its early times.

THE MEDIA

It looks certain that the daily newspapers have had a fundamental role in diffusing news and beliefs about "flying saucers", at first collecting them from the USA at the same time as the "Marshall plan" (1947-1950). Moreover, the growing number of published saucer news items was depending on the growth of the dailies' format from an average 2 pages (in 1946) to 12 pages (in 1954).

Less importance may be attributed to the radio, though we have

not enough data. More interesting are the illustrated weekly magazines. Virtually no ufologists at all were active in Italy at that time.

As for the dailies, some kept very reluctant to give flying saucers any coverage at all, at least until such attitude suddenly "collapsed" when more and more media talked about the subject during the early "waves" (1950, 1952, 1954), following a model similar to René Thom's "theory of catastrophes".

A complementary subject of interest was the contemporary diffusion of several kinds of "rumors", also arriving in "waves": the "ghost-car" (1946-47), the "end of the world", the "windshield cancer" (1954), "religious apparitions" (1948, 1950, 1954) which may enable us to test Dodd's mathematical model of "two rumors time diffusion", postulating that when there are two concurrent rumors of anomalies in a given area/period, the first one to appear is suppressed by the second one (that seems to be the case with religious apparitions being substituted by flying saucers stories during 1954).

Another interesting analysis is the "nearest neighbour" method used by Claude Gaudreau for analysing the US saucer wave of 1947 and the French one of 1954. Its application to the 1954 Italian press confirms that: 1) it's always possible to find a single newspaper acting as a "focus" for a given sighting; 2) some dailies within the same area soon form a "contagion network", generating new information and reports; 3) for each single info item there is on generating "focus". According to Gaudreau's analysis of the French wave, a mathematical model similar to gas diffusion equations would fit well, thus producing "epidemic" contagion of "flying saucer" info through the press. We are trying to test this hypothesis on the 1950 Italian wave.

A qualitative analysis of the 1947 newspapers also showed a cumulative process of Flying Saucer info/beliefs: the saucers arrive to Europe, a crashed saucer found in the USA (July 9, 1947), the first Italian report (July 12), the first mention of the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis (December 29, 1949), the first Italian wave (March-May 1950), the first Italian photo (May 6, 1950), the first CE-III (April 26, 1952), the coming of foreign ufologists (D. Menzel in 1952, D. Leslie in 1954), and so on.

A complex inter-relationship was also found between hoaxes, All-Fools-Day jokes, humanistic items, rumors, commercial advertising and Science-Fiction movies, since at least 1950.

A control group for our analyses were the ghost-rockets of 1946, the first kind of unusual aerial phenomena reported in Italian dailies. For example, there was a greater delay (30 days) between published Scandinavian reports and the first Italian ghost-rockets sightings than as for the 1947 U.S. flying saucers: that seems to be depending upon the greater "weight" (dimension and position of the news items) of the 1947 American information in the Italian papers.

Let's now report on some results we obtained from our analysis.

1947: THE UFO PHENOMENA COMES TO ITALY

All of a sudden the Flying Saucers appeared in the Italian national newspapers on July 8th, 1947, usually as a front-page news release from the USA: only smaller items were published in Italy on July 4th-6th, i.e. until the "New York Times" first pages began, on July 6th, to "awake" Italian news correspondents in the USA. On July 8th-9th, the saucer sightings came to Europe (UK and Denmark, at first) at the same time as the "atomic phenomena" and the "U.S. secret weapon" theories. No mention of K. Arnold was found, but Maury Island was reported here.

The prevalent name was "flying disks", "flying saucers" being used only in the very first week ["flying disks" is the name that has since been used in Italy].

On July 9th, the Roswell crashed-saucer was featured prominently on the first pages of the "nationals". Only four days after such information "peak", the first Italian sighting (at Bologna) was published on July 12th, and the "saucer-mania" took some more reports up to August. After about 100 articles, it all died down, only to re-born in 1950.

THE 1950 WAVE: MATHEMATICAL MODELS

As of today, we know of about 160 Italian sightings in 1950. It was not only the first large Italian UFO wave. In the spring of that year several "indicators" may be found showing that the "UFO myth" was already well established in Italy at such early time.

Keyhoe's and McLaughlin's articles in "True" generated the first mention of the ETH in our country, too. More interesting, we may distinguish two sub-waves: from March 13th to April 1st, and from April 5th to April 24th. The curve shape of both sub-waves clearly follows the above-mentioned S. Dodd's model, as well as C. Gaudeau's one. In both cases, the central part of the curve (the one with greater angles in the differential curve [see graph on page 34 of "UFO"]) follows "hard" items: on May 11/12 a crashed saucer and alien body found in Texas; on April 5th the H. Taylor's radio broadcast about US-made saucers.

A real psychosis took place in Italy: traffic jams because of people staring at the UFOs above, Air Force press-releases denying the existence of a UFO committee, the first comments by intellectuals, technicians and opinion leaders, while commercial advertising began using the "saucers" and "humanois". On July 8th, 1950 the flying saucers arrived in the House of Senate, through a parliamentary interrogation to the Government. At least 2,000 news items were published in 1950.

A LEXICOLOGICAL APPROACH TO "E.T."

French sociologist Jean-Bruno Renard examined the evolution of the meaning of the word "extra-terrestrial" in his own language for the last century: at first used in a spiritualistic context (as an adjective only), it became a substantive and a materialistic one (meaning the place of origin) when applied to flying saucers, but never lose its exotic meaning (the "extra-" also implying a sort of "superiority"). In Italy, it has been used since 1952, by intellectuals only, while up to the '60s witnesses and reporters kept on calling them "Martians".

CONTAGION FROM ABROAD

In 1984, Edoardo Russo formulated the following as a working hypothesis to verify or falsify through the "Operation Origins" then being launched:

"The UFO phenomenon was introduced to Italy in 1947 as a journalistic event, mostly as news items from abroad. Italian sightings at that time should thus only be vaguely ufologically-characterized.

The flying saucer myth in Italy was born only in the spring of 1950, with the first Italian sightings "wave", once again on the trail of news and sightings reported from abroad.

Also the 1954 wave "follows" the newspaper news about the French wave, then it takes on an autonomous development".

As of now, after five years of work, such hypotheses were all confirmed, but research is still in progress.

All ITUFOR abstracts, translations and mistakes are by Edoardo Russo.